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Living apart or together? Multiculturalism at a neighbourhood level¹

Peer Smets

Abstract Dutch urban renewal policies aim to engineer a mixture of different income groups in previously working-class neighbourhoods. The underlying notion is that such a social mix will improve the 'liveability' of the neighbourhood and that the more affluent residents will prevent the poorest from falling into a culture of poverty. As a result of this policy, the composition of the population in such neighbourhoods has changed and one can distinguish between the so-called native Dutch, immigrants, and 'newcomers,' who face problems in living together and sharing public spaces. This paper discusses the dynamics between the different groups in a Dutch neighbourhood, including its norms and values, and the role of intervening agencies.

Urban renewal

Since the 1960s, the processes of modernization, secularization, and individualization have increasingly shaped the way of life in Dutch working-class neighbourhoods. Many government reports suggest that social networks have become less tight and social control mechanisms have been eroded. Social order has become far less the product of tradition, social ties and common institutions. As a consequence of urban renewal projects and the arrival of migrants, the composition of such areas has changed, leading to a mixture of ethnic groups at the neighbourhood level. Language and cultural differences have made intergroup interaction more difficult (Veldboer and Duyvendak, 2001, p. 11). Over time, concerns have been raised about the liveability of working-class neighbourhoods

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and several renovation and community development schemes have been put in place (e.g. De Boer, 2001).

During the 1990s, urban renewal schemes were based on the idea that differentiating the composition of different income groups at the neighbourhood level could solve problems of social cohesion and integration. Encouraging diversity was believed to improve the socioeconomic position of low-income households. It was anticipated that the arrival of more affluent residents in a working-class neighbourhood would minimize the likelihood of low-income residents falling into a culture of poverty, where poverty, criminality, despair, and apathy are common. The poorer sections of society who adhere to this subculture are said to develop an inward-looking attitude, which is passed on from generation to generation as a reaction to their marginality and a failure to pursue middle-class norms and values. People brought up in a culture of poverty find themselves segregated from and expelled by mainstream society and tend to distrust formal organizations, but also have a low level of self-organization (Lewis, 1975).

It was assumed that so-called differentiation policies would ensure that the low-income residents identify with the higher income households in the neighbourhood and use them as a source of identification. In practice, however, a mix of different income groups is also a mixture of different ethnic groups designed to minimize segregation along ethnic lines. Different groups must, therefore, meet each other and interact, but a crucial issue is whether such a social mixture should be associated with a decline in social distance (be with us) or erosion of social differences (be like us) (Veldboer and Duyvendak, 2001, pp. 20–22).

In a recent government report on housing (VROM, 2000), the social composition component is set aside for a more market-oriented urban housing approach. In the big four Dutch cities, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht, there is an excess of social rental housing and a shortage of middle-class housing. To create a better match between demand and supply, social housing units in working-class neighbourhoods have to be demolished in order to make place for the construction of housing for the more affluent. Moreover, small units of social rental housing have to be combined to create larger and more expensive units for rent or sale. The assumption is that a flow of middle- and high-income tenants will move out of the cheap social rental housing units when they are afforded the opportunity to buy larger and qualitatively better housing. It is expected that those who can and are willing to pay more will move to the more expensive units. However, selling housing units from within the social rental sector also creates problems. By selling the qualitatively and quantitatively better housing units, a smaller pool of rental housing will be

available, which will be smaller and qualitatively inferior (Van Kempen and Priemus, 2001, p. 17).

When different income groups live together in a single neighbourhood, they can profit from each other so that, for example, higher income residents generate demand for particular products and services, such as cleaning and childcare, while the low-income people can supply them (Van Kempen and Priemus, 2002). However, while an increase in population differentiation can be achieved in the neighbourhood, a stigmatizing segregation may occur within the neighbourhood on the basis of street, housing complex, or specific parts of the neighbourhood (Elias and Scotson, 1985). A critical issue is the extent to which residents from different parts of the neighbourhood interact or ignore each other. Many policy reports expect a lot from such interaction, but critical studies (e.g. Duyvendak, 1999; Van Kempen and Priemus, 1999; Veldboer and Kleinhans, 2001) doubt whether residential mix leads to more interaction, which would improve the liveability of the neighbourhoods. Indeed one of the most important stumbling blocks in urban renewal schemes has been the issue of social cohesion.

Social cohesion

Social cohesion is seen as accompanying a good liveable atmosphere in a neighbourhood. It refers to the social binding of social systems, which change over time. Social ties can have a kind of internal glue (bonding), but also an external orientation and link to other social systems (bridging) (Veldboer and Duyvendak, 2001, pp. 18–19). Blokland argues that while the focus on social cohesion is relatively new, its roots lying in the concept of community.

There is a strong indication that although sociologists shy away from any mention of community and embrace the concept of social cohesion, they actually do broach the age-old community question. Any interdependency can create cohesion, but not every tie contributes to community. (Blokland, 2000, p. 67).

It appears that similar themes are recycled over time, but with changed labels. Just as with community, social cohesion is multifaceted and multi-interpretable and the discourse may be divided into two broad groups: communitarism and the rational choice theory. Communitarism can be roughly linked with Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and the rational choice theory with Tönnies' *Gesellschaft* (see Tönnies 2001). *Gemeinschaft* is often associated with pre-modern societies, where people are seen as affective social beings, motivated by feelings of togetherness and mutual solidarity.

Gesellschaft reflects on social networks and is formed by persons whose behaviour is rationally determined by making cost–benefit analyses (De Hart, 2002, pp. 7–8). This division corresponds with Durkheim’s concepts of organic and mechanic solidarity. Following the industrial revolution, the social cement began to erode and traditional society transformed from a homogeneous society with a collective conscience (mechanic solidarity) into a modern complex society (organic solidarity), which went together with the processes of individualization and an increasing labour division. Consequently, people became increasingly independent on each other, providing greater freedom. The question of strong ties (in mechanic solidarity) and weak ties (in organic solidarity) is central to this issue (Granovetter, 1973).

Current empirical research focuses mainly on the individual level, with special attention devoted to the possibilities and limitations, motives, and behaviour of individuals (De Hart, 2002, p. 12). The idea that social cohesion continues to erode is still widespread, but among others, Van der Stel (1999, p. 138) argues that while social cohesion is eroding at the local level, new levels of social integration appear, for example, on the global level. However, strong social cohesion can still be found in specific working-class neighbourhoods, where the dominant resident group has a strong inward orientation or a ‘we-feeling’ towards the outside world. These residents seek a lot of contact with each other (Terpstra, 1996, p. 211). In such circumstances, a culture of poverty can exist, where poor residents will be eager to accept deviant norms and behaviour as a reaction to their restricted opportunities to partake in mainstream society. This could result in an increasing isolation of those attached to this dominant worldview (Lewis, 1975).

Social cohesion, also known as soft infrastructure, is expected to tighten the social ties at the neighbourhood level and to improve the liveability of the neighbourhood. The soft infrastructure has both formal and informal components. The formal relates to organizations, services, and facilities that provide professional support for the residents. The informal component points to individuals or groups from civil society. Local social policies attempt to link the formal and informal component in such a way that they offer some surplus value. In short, the social infrastructure deals with the material and immaterial facilitation of social cohesion while all measures and arrangements seek the improvement of social integration and social cohesion at the neighbourhood level (Van Ginkel and Deben, 2002, p. 2).

Dutch community development workers have focused on the issues of liveability, safety, and social cohesion. The most important issue is that groups are in touch with and communicate with each other. In this

respect, Veldboer and Kleinhans (2001, p. 62) discuss the 'contact hypothesis,' which suggest that contact with (a) person(s) with another cultural background will lead to less prejudice and more openness for the group to which this person belongs. In short, more contact would lead to more empathy. Bovenkerk *et al.* (1985) have shown that contact with neighbours does not automatically or necessarily lead to fewer prejudices. A good neighbour can be seen as an exception of the general norm. Where there is more contact, more prejudices can be generated. The authors doubt whether more contact will lead to more mutual empathy and point out that it can also lead to indifference or even hostility to others. People tend to seek contact with those similar to themselves. Moreover, the way in which a specific neighbourhood is used by its residents is very diverse. As a consequence, it is unlikely that different resident groups will move closer to each other. Newcomers may not be interested in the established residents and vice versa (Van Kempen and Priemus, 1999). Such issues are now explored within the context of a single neighbourhood within Amsterdam, where the microcosmos of a street is the focus and where issues of residential differentiation and social cohesion become manifest.

Transvaalneighbourhood

The neighbourhood of Transvaalneighbourhood (Transvaalbuurt) is situated in the east of Amsterdam and was designed and developed in the beginning of the twentieth century. One can, however, still trace the influence of Berlage, the famous Amsterdam School architect, on the planning and design of the neighbourhood and its buildings. In the neighbourhood, municipal housing was constructed with the working class in mind. One small area completed in 1922 with low-rise buildings, the Kraaipanstraat as its main street, and surrounded by high-rise buildings can be described as almost fortified. The architect Jan Gratama described his aim as to create 'joyful' houses for the labourers and his design focused on the themes 'colourfulness and liveliness.' Although the new residents, previously slum-dwellers, obtained qualitatively better housing, the housing units were small, lacked shower facilities, bath, or a kitchen, but did have a scullery. Yet despite these shortcomings, the demand for these houses was high (Heijdra, 1997).

From the beginning, many initiatives have been employed to improve the quality of the neighbourhood. One of the latest initiatives at the turn of the millennium was the physical and social renovation of the Kraaipanstraat, including renewal of the sewage system, restructuring the road surfaces, pathways, and two courtyards, and installing new front doors and balcony ceilings. The appearance of the courtyards has changed from

half-closed to open areas and new, dark-blue infrastructural features, such as banks, cycle racks, and streetlights were installed. A local artist provided advice on a colour scheme and produced artworks for the surface of the street and gateway. Existing housing units were merged and initially rented and later sold on the free market. In August 2003, two such houses were offered for sale at a figure of 330.000 euros, which was high for the location. Following the merging of the units, new residents, mainly 'white' couples in their thirties and forties with young children, moved to the street as tenants and more recently home owners, mainly at and around the two courtyards, where they encountered a diversity of residents, including native Dutch and migrants of mainly Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese origin.

During this period of reconstruction, a residents group was established aimed at improving and monitoring the street's quality of life. One of its activities is the organization of a yearly festival, known as 'the picnic.' Residents are informed about the event through leaflets and posters. Participants bring their own food and drink, which are to be shared by all. In addition, specific festivities, such as a puppet show and street dance, are organized, and before the event residents clean the street. In August 2003, such a picnic took place, and some of the transactions are described below. From 16.00 to 17.00, mainly 'white' women and a few 'white' men cleaned the street, helped by some small children of different ethnicity. At the playground, preparations took place for the festivities as garlands were hung in trees, and tables and chairs were organized. Meanwhile, youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish origin were hanging around at a small square in the street. They were invited to play a game of football between the juniors and seniors on the playground. One of the organizers, a middle-aged 'white' man, asked a boy on a cycle to mobilize his friends for the football game. He added, 'we do this for you,' and explained to me that 'there were frictions between the football players. A few days ago, they were not allowed to play and now they have to turn up, so they boycott it.' A Surinamese youngster was invited by the community development worker to organize the football activities (a game and warming up). Owing to the boycott, he now only played with children up to 6–7 years of age.

Meanwhile, from a nearby window, lemonade was provided and slowly, home-made food and drinks were brought in, mainly by 'white' well-educated people. On the tables were many bottles of wine. Some migrant youngsters were hanging around and they were offered some snacks, including apple pie. When a clown and a person in a Tweety costume entered the scene with tricks and later balloons, a Turkish couple peeped from behind green bushes. They wanted to know what was going on.

It was the community development worker who invited them to join and sit down. None of the residents communicated with them. Elder youngsters just harassed the clown and Tweety by pulling at their costumes, and they tried to take the balloons from the small kids. The community development worker had to intervene to stop them. The Moroccan youngsters harassed her with sexual innuendo. The picnic continued as people chatted, ate, and drank before, slowly, people headed home, and by 21.00 all the residents had gone. It had been mainly 'white' well-educated residents who had participated in the picnic event. Some had complained about the low number of participants, especially amongst the immigrant population. The previous year had been better; it was more crowded and even some Turkish women had come to watch the dancing performance of their daughters and had brought a kind of pancake to eat. This year, the young people boycotted the football game. The background of this incident will be highlighted below.

Street football

Young people of Moroccan, Turkish, and Surinamese origin regularly play football in the courtyards. At one courtyard, some friction developed between the football players and the white residents of a corner house, whose dead wall was used as a shooting target. In addition, balls were regularly kicked at windows, front doors, balconies, and gardens. When balls were picked up from the gardens, plants were often partly or completely destroyed, while other activities were noisy and upset the residents. After residents talked to the young people about the inconvenience they experienced, agreements were reached with the youngsters and their parents that they would no longer play football at this particular location. Nonetheless, football activities continued and again and again discussions had to take place to convince the young people to stop.

A resident wrote letters of complaint to the city council, community police, the housing corporation, and community development unit, and, in January 2003, a meeting was organized to which all residents were invited, but only the 'whites' came, to discuss the topic 'living together' in the street. During the meeting, more residents expressed their concerns with the football-playing kids. During the summer in particular, football starts after school and continues until late in the evening. Residents argued that if they express their discontent with the youngsters' behaviour, they respond with abuse, even the 8–9 years age group. While it was easy to communicate with them individually, when they were in a group it was harder. Moreover, the young people's parents did not come out of their

houses to investigate when incidents occurred. These parents were also absent from the meeting.

It was the view of the newcomers that the children did not annoy them on purpose. Previously, the courtyards were less open places and plant boxes had kept balls away. During that period, youngsters played in the playground. One of the residents, who lived next to the playground, suggested that the youngsters could continue to play there. However, older youngsters had threatened the younger ones with knives and they were now afraid to play there, even when adult residents offered to join them. The community police had offered to help, which would show that it was possible to play there and it also contributed to building trust in the police. One alternative put forward was the larger squares at other points in the neighbourhood, but the youngsters had been told to leave these because the adults there were playing for money. The residents and professionals present at the meeting proposed that an alternative place for playing football had to be made attractive, and the courtyards less appealing by placing physical objects as barriers. However, insufficient municipal funds presented a significant obstacle. Moreover, the children had to be informed about the activities in the neighbourhood centre. While the street could be used to play football, the youngsters must be quiet and not make a nuisance, and were not allowed to hit walls, doors, windows, and balconies. The community police offered to visit the parents of the football players if necessary. The residents at the meeting also agreed on the following points, which were later spread house by house:

- parents are responsible for the behaviour of their children;
- football will not be played in the gateway or against houses;
- football playing should preferably take place at the playground and crossings;
- after 22.00 it should be quiet in the street;
- in case of persistent nuisance, the local community policeman should be informed and would contact the parents;
- residents acknowledge these rules and encourage compliance.

In February 2003, the youngsters had a meeting at the neighbourhood centre to discuss the nuisance of football playing, its location, alternative activities, and the support that could be provided. It was agreed that the children should not play where residents experience nuisance and will stop when residents ask them to do so. The youngsters were still avoiding those squares where they had experienced them as being unsafe and were asked to report such problems to the community policeman, the support centre Transvaal (*steunpunt Transvaal*), or the neighbourhood centre.

In March 2003, a second residents meeting took place, attended by a small number of residents, but also the elder sisters of the football players. A positive attitude was evident toward the changes that were taking place, but the need for the placing of physical obstacles was emphasized. At first sight, it felt as though football incidents had declined, but a couple of days before the picnic, the football players were banned from playing in the street.

Living together: a matter of finding the right tune

As illustrated above, housing differentiation in the Kraaipanstraat led to a new social mix among residents – native Dutch, immigrants, and the newcomers – with the latter being mainly ‘white’, well-educated people. Since the end of the 1990s, newcomers had moved into the merged rental housing units, while the renovation of the street took place. The newcomers wanted to invest in a better living environment and have taken up several initiatives to encourage and improve contact between the residents. They have exchanged gifts with neighbours and organized inclusive street festivals. As a result, the soft infrastructure or social cohesion should become more manifest. This process of living together is guided by, for example, the city council, housing corporation, community police, community development workers, and the residents group, which is itself dominated by the newcomers.

The newcomers’ intention to invest in the relations between residents, however, was not appreciated by all. One of the activities was the annual picnic. A ‘white’ woman, who helped to organize the picnic, was disappointed by the poor turnout of the immigrant families and stressed, ‘We try to get them involved, but they do not come. It has to be a bit spontaneous.’ Another ‘white’ woman, who wanted to involve the Muslim immigrants, added, ‘We feel that we should organize something for the women, but that takes too much effort. Because then we also have to organize something for the men.’ The newcomers stressed that the participation of non-Dutch people was necessary for the picnic to be considered a success. It had been agreed that neither pork nor ham would be used in the picnic dishes, but one native Dutch resident said when he was invited to attend, ‘Why should we join the picnic. We want to eat ham and bacon.’

The picnic of 2003 had taken place in the playground. Tables were packed with food and wine bottles. The consumption of alcohol was one of the reasons why Muslim migrants refrained from participating. Moreover, photographs taken at the picnic may have encouraged the non-Dutch residents, especially women, to stay away. Only one Turkish couple

joined, but almost no interaction with the newcomers took place and it had been the community development worker who had to offer them a seat. The 'whites' probably expected that the Turkish couple could help themselves. They expected the opportunity to be together, but, in practice, the participants of the picnic tended to stay apart.

Youngsters hung around a short distance away and although some food was offered they tried to disrupt the activities. A 'white' woman expressed her irritation, 'These brats of sixteen will not dictate what I do. I am not afraid of them.' Different notions concerning the use of public space perhaps lie at the root of these irritations. The street is for everybody, but any existing user determines what goes on there. Weather permitting, the children of immigrant families are sent out to play on the street as a consequence of the size of the households to which they belong and the small nature of the houses. In the courtyards, many residents enjoy sitting on the benches and youngsters like to play football. While playing, they hit walls, doors, and windows, causing friction between the newcomers and adolescents of non-Dutch origin. The newcomers and the youngsters discussed the problem of nuisance, but there were also youths from other streets involved who are hard to trace and thus confronting them was almost impossible. Here, social control could hardly be enforced. The newcomers attempted to speak with the parents of the youngsters living in the street, but these parents believe that it is the council's job to maintain order in public areas. This was particularly emphasized by the Moroccans, who consider only the private area their domain, and if they are not accompanying their children on the street, they are also not responsible for reprimanding them. Someone with authority (i.e. the police) has to do it. This has led to problems between the residents, leaving one 'white' native Dutch resident to comment, 'Let them educate their children.'

In practice, while the Moroccan residents tended to keep their adolescent daughters at home, their adolescent sons tended to adhere to a street culture, which is to a large extent determined by their leaders and to a lesser extent by their parents or family members. In addition, during this period of economic recession, many youngsters face problems of socio-economic deprivation, which appears to bring them together. When alone, it is easier to talk about problems, but as soon as they operate in groups it becomes more difficult because they become more extreme in their expressions. The nuisance they cause creates intergenerational friction, which then becomes perceived as ethnic conflict between 'whites' and mainly Moroccans. The youngsters are caught between two sets of norms and values. At home, *Gemeinschaft*-like norms and values, including social control, have to be adhered to, and at school, work, and in public space

more emphasis is put on *Gesellschaft*-like norms and values, where social pressure to self-control and self control dominates. Here, social pressure is not always experienced as such by the youngsters. This tension can harm the process of identity formation of Moroccan youngsters.

Social control exercised on the streets does not always work well. The newcomers do not feel that they are being taken seriously by the football players, who even anticipate the non-appearance of police when problems arise. The community police will visit parents to explain the problems caused by the young people and to discuss problems in the neighbourhood, but the parents associate such visits with dishonour and shame. Fathers are encouraged to accompany their sons when playing football and it is hoped that by doing so, the control mechanism can move from the private to the public domain. To bring authority (social control) to the street, Moroccan 'contact fathers' have also been introduced. These 'fathers' attempt to establish a better reputation for the Moroccan community in the neighbourhood and patrol the streets around one of the big squares and the youth centre, especially after 21.00 and during special events.

Despite many initiatives, contact between residents tends to be restricted to neighbours. For example, one of the new home-owners does not negotiate with other residents or the community police, but directly calls the mayor's office when he experiences problems. Native Dutch residents are often not aware of the channels that can be used to complain and solve problems, and even when such channels are known, prejudices often remain. For example, it is believed that the support centre Transvaal is only for 'whites.' In addition, the council's role may also be questioned as they promised to place goalposts in the playground, but nothing has been done and no communication has taken place about the delays.

Differentiation has led to a situation of forced living together. Newcomers try to initiate more interaction with other residents groups, but tend to develop an inward-looking attitude when initiatives to link with other ethnicities are not as easy as expected. Contacts with residents of another ethnic or social background appear to be difficult, and many initiatives have been unsuccessful. Differentiation will not lead to a model of living together with different ethnic groups, but there is also no way to stay apart, especially when friction occurs over the use of the public space. Such situations reflect what Veldboer and Kleinhans (2001, p. 67) call 'living together apart.' According to this model, differentiation can have a function of 'thinning problems,' which can improve safety and liveability of the street. This leads to a more or less peaceful coexistence of different groups, because there is a tendency for residents to look to their own social groups for contact and a declining search for new or renewed

social configurations. There is thus a real possibility that residents will become more or less indifferent and end up avoiding each other altogether. Misunderstandings and frictions are covered up, but escalations can occur.

Conclusions

The question raised in this article is whether housing differentiation can lead to improved social cohesion and liveability. Differentiation goes together with welfare policies, police control, and neighbourhood improvement and maintenance. In this example it was expected that newcomers, owner-occupiers, and tenants of the larger housing units in an ethnically and culturally mixed street, would instigate initiatives to improve the quality of life in the street. While this expectation proved correct, the pioneers who sought to improve the quality of life have also obtained a position of dominance in the street.

To obtain better bridging social cohesion, contact and communication between the different residents is necessary. Newcomers tend to have an open mind towards other residents, including other ethnic groups and different generations. Moreover, being together is not as easy as it may appear. To get in touch with neighbours who belong to another residential group is not always free from miscommunication and misinterpretations concerning, for example, reciprocity and the use of the public space. Some newcomers even started questioning their investments in the informal soft infrastructure, despite the support offered to them by this infrastructure. Only in the future will we know whether they will regain their interest and desire to continue, or whether they will stop trying to organize community activities. In addition, confrontations between youngsters of different ethnic origin and newcomers will probably continue. Youngsters grow up and new youngsters of other parents will also arrive. The role that the newcomers, tenants of the merged housing units, and the house buyers will play in the street is interesting. Will they mix with the newcomers and/or other residential groups, or not at all? As the above illustrates, the social cohesion between the residential groups and their generations with their own identity will keep on changing, which will have an impact on the way in which residential groups will live together. At present, it looks as if the pattern of living together will be 'living apart together'; frictions caused by different views on the use of the public space will contribute to this process.

The differentiation policy associated with linking the formal and informal part of the soft infrastructure lacks the desired surplus value. On the formal side, institutions tend to link with the more affluent, who are often the 'whites', with the expectation that they will be responsible for the

advancement of the low-income, often ethnic minority groups. The norms and values of the newcomers tend to provide the dominant paradigm. In short, residential differentiation in combination with a link between the formal and informal soft infrastructure tends to stimulate social cohesion among the newcomers. In practice, bridging social capital between the different ethnic groups appears to be too challenging. To prevent groups falling into a culture of poverty demands contact and links with the middle classes. In this case study, these are not very strong, if at all available. Social cohesion (bonding) has increased, but bridging appears to have failed.

On the basis of the insights developed by this paper, recommendations for community development in a neighbourhood with a residential differentiation can be given. First, residential differentiation and community development should go hand in hand. Secondly, mutual understanding between ethnic groups can be helped by facilitating contact and communication. In this way, prejudices can be discussed and questioned. Thirdly, community development has to focus on bridging different groups within civic society. Fourthly, while public participation is a good panacea, it should be rooted in all ethnic groups at the street level and in the neighbourhood. Apart from getting in touch with residents directly, they can be approached through 'ethnic' (self-)organizations. In short, one should keep in mind that physical differentiation alone will not automatically lead to increased liveability and community development guidance is required.

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